MENU OF GRAVETTIAN PEOPLE FROM SOUTHERN MORAVIA

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ABSTRACT: There are a number of Upper Palaeolithic sites of Gravettian people in the southern Moravia. These people had eaten animals and their bones were used for creating artefacts. Their food was based on several species that lived in the vicinity of their settlement unit. The sites Dolní Věstonice II (Under Western Slope - UWS), Ila and III and Pavlov (1952, 1953, 1957 and 1958) have been studied to obtain a picture of the menu of Gravettian people in this region. Hunted animals fall into two groups, the first one includes those species hunted consistently and the second group those hunted occasionally. The following animals rank among the first group: mammoth, reindeer, horse, wolf, hare and fox. The second group includes bear, lion, wolverine, wildcat, lynx, deer, wooly rhinoceros and birds. The carnivores were hunted for their hides, fur and bones. The long bones of hunted animals were crushed for marrow. The proximal parts of bones were used for creating tools since distal parts of bones have been found predominantly. Teams of several hunters hunted herd animals. The rest of the species was hunted accidentally, some of them probably by hunting nets.

INTRODUCTION

There are a number of very famous and interesting sites of Gravettian people (Upper Palaeolithic) in the southern Moravia region. The excavations at these sites yielded a considerable quantity of artefacts, small figures and skeletons of people. Bones of animals were found also abundantly. Human had eaten these animals and their bones were used for creating artefacts. All these animal bones have been studied from the osteometrical and morphological point of view [NÝVLTOVÁ-FIŠÁKOVÁ, in press; MUSÍL, 1959a,b, 1997]. Not all of the species found at the sites had been eaten by Gravettian people. The sites Dolní Věstonice II (Under Western Slope - UWS), Ila and III have been studied directly. Older finds of the Upper Pleistocene fauna in the Dolní Věstonice area were studied by MUSÍL [1959a]. The site Pavlov located in the surrounding of Dolní Věstonice was also

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studied by Musil [1959b, 1994, 1997]. To obtain a more complete picture of the menu of Gravettian people all his data have been used as well.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

I have studied material from three excavations. The first data come from the 1986's excavation, the second ones from the excavations period of 1993-1995 and the third ones from the saving excavation of 1999. The rest of the data have been used from older researches by Musil [1959a, b, 1994, 1997]. The bones have been examined from osteological and palaeoethnological point of view. The bone material is deposited in the Department of Palaeolithic and Palaeoethnology, Institute of Archaeology, Czech Academy of Sciences, Dolní Věstonice.

RESULTS

Site Dolní Věstonice I

Animal bones from both of the two settlement units have been studied. For further details see Klíma [1950, 1952].

The list of taxa found at the DV I site [Musil, 1959a]

Family Leporidae: Lepus timidus; family Felidae: Panthera spalaea, Lynx lynx; family Canidae: Canis lupus, Alopex lagopus, Vulpes vulpes; family Mustelidae: Gulo gulo; family Ursidae: Ursus spelaeus; family Elephantidae: Mammuthus primigenius; family Equidae: Equus germanicus; family Cervidae: Rangifer tarandus; family Bovidae: Bos sp. seu Bison sp.

Man had crushed all bones from above mentioned animals in the middle diaphysis. The scarce of bones of cave lion; cave bear, wolverines, bovid and lynx show rarity these animals. On other hand, remains of mammoth are quite common. All bones of the skeleton of individuals of different age have been found. Most of these bones had been crushed and broken by man. Only some bones of the postcranial skeleton of horse have been found at the site. Bones from young and very old individuals of horse prevail absolutely. Most of the long bones and metapodials had been crushed [Musil, 1959a].

Sites Dolní Věstonice II (UWS), IIa and III

The list of taxa found at the localities DV II, DV IIa and DV III. (For further details see Nývltová-Fisáková - in press).


All bones from above mentioned animals have been found (with the exception cave lion, bear, woolly rhinoceros and wildcat. These animals are rare found in the settlement units of Gravettian people). Only some bones of the postcranial skeleton of horse have been found at the sites. A number of bones had been chopped transversally. Distal halves of long bones have been found more frequently. Remains of mammoth are quite common. All bones of the skeleton of individuals of different age have been found. Most of these bones had been crushed and broken. However, seven pelvises and mandibles had not been broken. Milk molars have also been found.
Site Pavlov (1952, 1953, 1957 and 1958)

The list of taxa found at the Pavlov site (1952, 1953, 1957 and 1958) - Musil [1997]

Aves - Corvus corax, Dafila acuta, Cygnus cygnus


Finds of bird’s bones are negligible [Musil, 1997]. Very few hare, deer, woolly rhinoceros, bears, lynx, cave lion and foxes bones have been found. Some of them had been broken. Distal halves have been found more frequently. Bones of wolverines are rare worldwide. At this site, however, complete bones of the animal have been excavated [Musil, 1997]. Only some bones of the postcranial skeleton of horse have been found at the sites. All bones from the skeleton of mammoth have been found. In some cases fragments of burned bones have been found. The reindeer’s bones belonged to individuals of different ages. The open epiphysis on some of the bones indicated that they belonged to young animals. All bones are fragmentary, chopped longitudinally and transversally by humans. Long bones are broken in the diaphysis. The proximal parts of the long bones are missing. The similar situation occurs with other species above mentioned.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Quantitatively hunted animals fall into two groups. The first group includes those species hunted consistently and the second one those hunted occasionally. The following animals rank among the first group: mammoth, reindeer, horse, wolf, hare and fox. The second group includes bear, lion, wolverine, wildcat, lynx, deer, woolly rhinoceros and birds. The food of Gravettian people was based on several species that lived in the vicinity of their settlement unit. The carnivores as wolf, fox, wolverine, lion, bear, wildcat and lynx were probably hunted for their hides, fur and bones. Wolf and fox may have been used as food during times of food scarcity. Hare was used as food and also for its fur. Hunted animals (mammoth, reindeer, horse, hare, etc.) served primarily as food and secondly as raw material to create tools or object of art.

The long bones of hunted animals were crushed for marrow. Marrow is a very rich food as far as its nutritional value is concerned. The proximal parts of bones were used for some reason or other (tools?) since distal parts of bones have been found predominantly. Only some bones of the postcranial skeleton of horse have been found at the sites. It is evident that the entire horse carcass had been butchered into movable units and then transported to the site. The bones of the wolverine and sometimes those of fox and wolf do not show clear evidence of cultural attack. Hunters also employed different strategies to obtain different prey. Herd animals as teams of several hunters hunted mammoth, reindeer and horse. Individual hunters hunted wolf, fox and hare probably by hunting nets. The rest of the species was hunted accidentally.

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